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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

BUREAU OF FISHERIES

Economic Circular No. 25

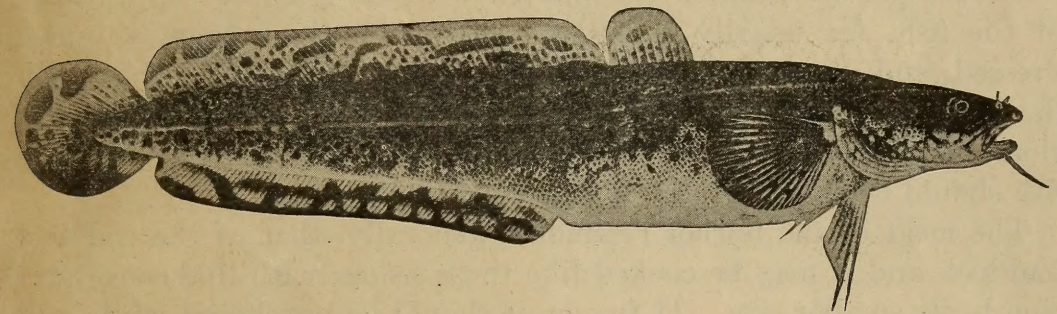
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THE BURBOT:

A Fresh-Water Cousin to the Cod.^a

A famous Italian naturalist of the sixteenth century relates that a certain countess carried her fondness for the burbot so far that she expended most of her revenue in its purchase. The lady's income is not stated, but if there be American housewives ambitious to live like countesses, they now have the opportunity without plunging into bankruptcy, for the burbot is coming on the markets at a price which will place it within the reach of modest means. That there are additional and better reasons for using it is shown by the testimony of other authorities, one of whom says that in continental Europe it "has long been esteemed a great luxury * * * ; its flesh is white and delicate, while its liver is its most delicious morsel."



In our own country it is almost unknown except to fishermen, and by them it is but little regarded because, heretofore, it has not been readily convertible into cash. Somebody, years ago, in an attempt at wit called it "lawyer," because, as explained by a Lake Erie fisherman, "it preys on its fellows and is no good itself." The author of the quip and his successors have paid the penalty, so often following an ill-natured epigram, and have unwittingly lost a source of revenue, while the public has been deterred from using a needed food supply. The fish is also variously called eelpout, eeling, ling, cusk, and a score of names, most of which properly belong to other species, but its good old English name burbot, which is rarely used in the United States, outside of books and a few restricted localities in the East, has the sanction of propriety and ancient usage.

The burbot has the distinction of being the only fresh-water member of the cod family, all of its relatives living in the sea. Its habitat circles the earth, two almost indistinguishable species being found, one each, in the lakes and larger streams of the northern

^a By H. F. Moore, Deputy Commissioner, Bureau of Fisheries.

parts of the two hemispheres. In North America it occurs from the Arctic Circle, and perhaps beyond it, to the Ohio and Missouri Rivers, being particularly abundant in the Great Lakes and the larger waters of New England, New York, Canada, and Alaska.

It is said to spawn in the winter and early spring and like most of its family is exceedingly prolific, estimates of the number of eggs ranging from 160,000 in a medium-sized fish to 670,000 in a large one. Its voracity is notorious. By day it hides in the holes and crannies of the bottom or in the deeper waters, but at night it goes forth to prey on other fishes, crawfishes, and, at least in early life, on aquatic insects and fish eggs. Its highly distensible stomach is as elastic as its appetite and it takes a heavy toll of its neighbors, the particular trait which has brought it into disfavor with the fishermen who brook no rivalry in their calling.

In shape the burbot is rather elongate, but with age it has a tendency to lose its slender figure and to become "pot-bellied." In life it is beautifully marbled with dark green, or greenish black, and yellow, but the colors quickly fade after death. The consumer, however, will have but little concern with the physical appearance of the fish, for usually it will be placed on the market skinned, dressed, and decapitated, and what he buys will be all edible, with the exception of a small portion of backbone. With no transportation charges to be paid on waste parts, and its low initial cost, the fish should be as low-priced as it is good.

The meat of the burbot resembles, generally, that of the cod and haddock and it may be cooked like those fishes, with due consideration to its smaller size. If frozen, it should be purchased while still congealed and thawed in cold water immediately before using.

RECIPES.

[Recipe No. 1 was contributed by Mrs. Albert Sidney Burleson; Nos. 2 and 7 by Mrs. William C. Redfield; Nos. 3 and 13, Lake Erie fishermen's recipes; Nos. 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 adopted from New England Fish Exchange recipes.]

1. *Burbot mousse*.—Steam the fish until tender, about 30 minutes; remove bones and press meat through a colander. Prepare a white sauce as follows:

Into a saucepan put 1 tablespoonful butter, 1 tablespoonful flour, and 1 salt-spoonful salt. When hot, add gradually 1 cupful of milk, cook until smooth, about 10 minutes, stirring constantly.

To 2 cupfuls of the prepared fish add the sauce, 1 small onion minced, 1 tablespoonful minced parsley, 1 tablespoonful melted butter, and the beaten whites of 2 eggs. Mix all together thoroughly and put in a mold. Put in a cool place for 3 or 4 hours. Turn onto a platter and serve cold with egg sauce.

2. *Burbot hash*.—Flake 1 pound of cold, cooked fish, add 1 pint of boiled potatoes in small pieces, mix with 1 teaspoonful of butter, and season with salt and pepper. Place in a buttered frying pan and stir until thoroughly heated, then leave long enough to brown on the bottom. Turn out on a platter, brown side up.

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3. *Fried burbot*.—Remove the backbones from 4 pounds of burbot and cut the fish into suitable pieces for serving. Salt and pepper both sides, dip in egg and roll in cracker dust or bread crumbs. Fry on both sides to a golden brown. If the fish are large, they are better if the pieces be first parboiled.

4. *Boiled burbot*.—Boil 3 pounds of fish and serve with egg sauce made as follows:

Thicken 1 pint of milk with corn starch or flour, add a lump of butter the size of a walnut, 1 egg, salt, and pepper. Boil and stir briskly until flakes of egg yolk come to the top.

5. *Burbot and spaghetti*.—Boil about 1 pound of fish for 10 minutes in salt water, drain, cool, and flake it. Prepare 2 cupfuls of boiled spaghetti. Mix 2 tablespoonfuls of butter, 3, tablespoonfuls of flour, 2 cups of milk, salt, and pepper, and boil until thick. Place a layer of spaghetti in a baking dish, then a layer of fish and cover with the sauce and a few slices of hard-boiled egg. Spread bread crumbs over this, moisten them with a little melted butter, and bake until brown.

6. *Burbot with tomato sauce*.—Prepare the fish as in the preceding recipe. Mix one-half can of tomatoes, 1 chopped onion, one-half tablespoonful of salt, one-fourth tablespoonful of pepper, and 1 clove. Allow this to simmer for 10 minutes and strain through a sieve or colander. Mix 1 tablespoonful of butter and 1 tablespoonful of flour, slowly add the tomato sauce, stir until smooth, and simmer for 5 minutes. Fill a baking dish with alternate layers of fish and tomato sauce, and cover with a cup of bread crumbs moistened with 3 tablespoonfuls of melted butter. Brown in a hot oven.

7. *Scalloped burbot*.—Boil the fish one-half hour, remove the bones, and break into fine flakes. Rub to a smooth paste, over the fire, a piece of butter the size of an egg and 1 large spoonful of flour; add slowly 1 pint of milk until it makes a rich cream, stirring over the fire until thoroughly cooked. Add the fish, and season with salt, pepper, finely chopped parsley, a little chopped onion, Worcestershire sauce, etc., as desired. Put the mixture in a baking dish with bits of butter and cracker crumbs, and set in the oven to brown. Or the creamed fish may be served on hot toast.

8. *Scalloped burbot*.—Place 2 cupfuls of skinned fish cut into small pieces in a baking dish. Dredge over it one-third cup of flour, add one-half tablespoonful of salt, pepper, and 2 tablespoonfuls of butter. Cover with milk, and bake for 30 to 40 minutes.

9. *Burbot pudding*.—Finely flake 1 pound of cold cooked fish, add 4 medium-sized potatoes mashed, a piece of butter the size of a walnut, and one-half cup of milk, mixing the ingredients thoroughly. Place in a pudding dish and cook for 1 hour in an oven at moderate temperature.

10. *Burbot rarebit*.—Mix in a pan or chafing dish a teaspoonful of melted butter, a few drops of onion juice, 1 tablespoonful of cornstarch, one-half teaspoonful of salt, and a very little paprika. As the dish warms, add gradually 1 cup of milk, three-fourths of a cup of chopped cheese, and 1 cupful of cold, finely flaked fish. To the thickening mixture add 1 beaten egg and 1 tablespoonful of lemon juice. Serve very hot on thin toast.

11. *Burbot omelette*.—Beat 4 eggs slightly and add a pinch of salt, 1 tablespoonful of flour, and three-fourths pound of cold, cooked fish. Place in a very hot, well-buttered frying pan, cover tightly, and cook until brown.

12. *Bourbot chowder*.—Cut the meat from the bones of 4 pounds of skinned fish. Cover the bones and the head with cold water and boil for one-half hour. Fry until tender 2 small sliced onions and 4 thin slices of fat salt pork. Skim out the pork and onions and add the strained bone liquor and 1 quart of sliced

raw potatoes. Cook for 10 minutes and add the fish, 1 tablespoonful of salt, and one-half teaspoonful of white pepper. When the potatoes have become tender, add 1 quart of hot milk, thickened with 2 ounces of butter and flour mixed together. Serve with crackers.

13. *Burbot in sour*.—Cut 5 pounds of burbot into pieces about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, without removing backbone. Steam for one-half hour and pack the pieces in an earthen jar. Take 3 pints of vinegar, 1 teaspoonful sugar, one-half teaspoonful of salt, 1 heaping teaspoonful of whole cloves, pepper, and allspice, a sliced onion, and boil for 10 minutes. Pour over the fish and let stand until cold.

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